

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, March 30, 2007

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March 30, 2007

Slain boy's parents seek kids' custody

Canton couple want to care for 2 children as they expect their 10th.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

One child after another, Matt and Jennifer Lethbridge have experienced a grief unlike any other with the loss of their nine children.

Two of their children died last year: 2-year-old Isaac was killed in a Detroit foster home and their special-needs daughter, Ashleigh, died at age 12 in an adoptive home.

The Lethbridges also lost their parental rights to five other children in 2001 and 2002.

Now, the Canton couple is trying to convince Washtenaw County Family Court Judge Darlene O'Brien to reunite them with two of their children who are in foster care -- and the only two of the nine they still have a chance of raising.

The decision could impact whether they are allowed to keep their 10th child, due next month.

"Anyone who trusts me enough to give me a chance will not be disappointed," Jennifer Lethbridge told O'Brien in a hearing last month.

Testimony will conclude today before O'Brien, who will decide whether to send the two girls, ages 11 months and 4, back to their parents or keep them in a Washtenaw County foster home.

The couple lost their 4-year-old daughter when state officials removed her in 2005 with Isaac.

Westland Police came to their home and found the children playing with food on the floor, and cloth diapers were stacked in the kitchen, some with feces on them; several flies were inside and maggots were on garbage outside the home.

The 11-month-old daughter was removed shortly after her birth in 2006.

Jennifer Lethbridge testified that she couldn't clean the Westland home because the plumbing wasn't working and water wouldn't drain; the children were in dirty diapers because they had just eaten.

Since then, she and her husband have attended parenting classes, participated in individual and joint counseling and other programs that she says has helped transform them and their parenting skills.

"Our children are the centerpiece of our lives," she said.

O'Brien's decision will come as Jennifer Lethbridge is due April 15 to deliver her 10th child.

She also faces high likelihood that the Michigan Department of Human Services officials will remove her newborn if they are not reunited with their two children in foster care.

The Lethbridges' rights to five of their children -- including Ashleigh -- were severed in 2001.

They were removed because of hygienic, environmental and medical neglect despite remedial services, according to court documents.

Their parental rights were severed in 2002 to a sixth child who was born five months after their rights were severed to their five other children.

State officials have recommended terminating the couple's rights to their two daughters who are currently in foster care.

Last month, two mental health professionals gave conflicting testimony on whether the Lethbridges should get their children back.

Joshua Ehrlich, a clinical psychologist, testified that Jennifer Lethbridge failed to take responsibility for her behavior and blamed others for her situation following four meetings with her.

But Celestine Brown, a social worker, testified the couple has made significant progress and their children should be returned to them with services in their home to support them.

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Couple receive sentences for abuse of their infant

Friday, March 30, 2007

LaNIA COLEMAN

THE SAGINAW NEWS

BAD AXE -- A Huron County Circuit Court judge has sentenced a Bad Axe couple whose abuse left their infant son near death.

Judge M. Richard Knoblock ordered Stardust L. Welshans, 24, to spend 2 1/2 years to 10 years in prison, with credit for 215 days, for assault with intent to do great bodily harm. The mother of two also must pay \$120 in fines and fees and undergo mental health treatment while imprisoned.

Knoblock sentenced Ryan S. Welshans to 10 months in jail, with full credit, and four years of probation for obstruction of justice and acting as an accessory after the fact. The judge also ordered him to pay \$215 in fees and fines.

The 24-year-old also must register as a sex offender, Knoblock ordered.

The couple pleaded guilty in February to the charges in exchange for authorities dismissing first-degree felony child abuse charges against each of them. Stardust Welshans pleaded guilty but mentally ill.

The child abuse charge, which carries a 15-year penalty, stemmed from a Feb. 4, 2006, assault on the couple's month-old son in Bad Axe. Investigators argued that the Welshanses squeezed, threw and dropped the infant.

Doctors at Hurley Medical Center in Flint treated the baby for a fractured skull, ribs, collarbone and other injuries. Hurley pediatricians ruled the 7-pound infant's injuries were the result of intentional child abuse.

In May, the Welshanses surrendered their parental rights to the injured boy and his brother, now 3 years old.

Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner has said the boys are living in separate homes in Huron County and the families are adopting them. v

LaNia Coleman covers law enforcement. You may reach her at 776-9690.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Police left holding the baby during chase

Friday, March 30, 2007

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Muskegon police officers who responded to a domestic assault Wednesday night outside a home in the 2200 block of Henry Street found themselves left with a 10-month-old baby.

They were dispatched at 8:55 p.m. when someone reported that a man was assaulting a woman in the street. The woman, who turned out to be the baby's mother, left in a vehicle before officers got there.

Before officers had a chance to talk to the suspect, he took off running with the 10-month-old girl, said Muskegon Detective Capt. Mark Lewis.

Officers started chasing him, and during the foot pursuit, "the man ended up handing the baby to a passerby," Lewis said. One officer continued to chase the suspect, while the other officer retrieved the baby.

The suspect, who lived with the baby's mother, was wanted on three warrants, Lewis said. He ran east across Seaway Drive and was stopped on Lemuel Street by a Roosevelt Park officer.

The baby was turned over to the Department of Human Services. Officers checked the home where the man and woman lived to make sure no other children were left alone there. Witnesses told police the man did not have the baby at the time of the fight.

A domestic violence misdemeanor warrant against the man still was pending.

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Courts ultimately failed Rose

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

VERNON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, March 30, 2007

By Anthony G. Czerwinski

JOURNAL READER

Who failed Rose Kelley? Well, it seems as though everyone in this little girl's life did.

But other than her parents, the most guilty seems to be the court system. Her parents were given a minimum of 17 months in prison for her death, while people caught possessing - not selling - drugs are locked up for years. How her parents were charged with involuntary manslaughter is beyond me. They should never see the light of day.

Anthony G. Czerwinski

Vernon

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Claims about accused molester ignored, dad says

Friday, March 30, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

A father of twin boys said he was suspicious of Jamie VanKlaveren's behavior toward his sons five years ago, but no one would listen to him.

The twins' 39-year-old father said he contacted authorities this week after hearing VanKlaveren, 26, was charged with sexually assaulting boys. Police are investigating allegations he may have as many as 18 victims spanning several suburbs in Kent and Allegan counties where he has lived.

The man's twins told a relative they shared a bed with VanKlaveren five years ago in a Grandville home.

"I made allegations on this guy 5 years ago, and so many didn't believe me," said the father of the twins, who now are 13. "There are kids who could have been protected. Families are suffering because no one listened to me."

He said Wyoming Police, the lead investigators on VanKlaveren's case, are looking into his claims.

"The detective was stunned. ... I thank God he is in jail. I'm just sorry it took five years," the father said.

VanKlaveren remains in the Kent County Jail on a \$350,000 bond. On Wednesday, the Wyoming man waived his preliminary hearing on charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a 13-year-old boy, sending that case to Kent County Circuit Court.

He also waived preliminary exams in the cases of three other alleged victims.

Authorities from the Kent and Allegan sheriff's departments and Wyoming Police now are tracking where VanKlaveren has lived since he stopped attending East Kentwood High School after the 11th grade. Investigators have said VanKlaveren is alleged to have lured neighbor children with movie rentals, food and friendship.

Police know he has moved frequently. Previous addresses include homes in Cutlerville, Kentwood, Grandville and Wyoming in Kent County, as well as several Allegan County communities.

VanKlaveren also has two other sex abuse cases pending in Kent County. Allegan County has not yet issued any charges.

Kent sheriff's Detective William Heffron interviewed VanKlaveren about an alleged sex assault in Gaines Township last year and said he had a "bad feeling."

"Until my involvement with him in December, he had no real criminal history. He was not anybody that neighbors had concerns about," Heffron said.

But after interviewing him and then learning of the Wyoming allegations, "we started hearing a major pattern. This is an absolute classic case of grooming. This guy is a poster child of a pedophile for grooming."

One mother told police she initially thought nothing of VanKlaveren buying small gifts for neighborhood children, but now sees it as suspicious.

"He was getting them to feel comfortable coming over and spending the night," Heffron said of the boys VanKlaveren allegedly molested.

Heffron said he could not recall the last time Kent County authorities investigated a suspect with so many alleged victims who was not affiliated with a church or school.

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03/30/2007

Reports of shoplifting on the rise

By [Kelly Dame](#)

Midland Daily News

Midland Police have been called to many recent shoplifting complaints at stores on the north end of town, with the two latest coming Wednesday.

A total of three people were arrested after they were caught stealing for various reasons, including to sell items for cash.

Officers were called to Sears, 6810 Eastman Ave., at 1:43 p.m. after store employees stopped a 27-year-old Essexville woman who had left the store with a cart containing 41 DVDs and an electric razor hidden in the belongings of a 3-year-old girl. The woman struggled with the employees, causing minor injuries to one.

The woman told police she stole the items, valued at \$1,014, because she needed money to buy her son birthday presents. She also said the 30-year-old Essexville man who was with her acted as a lookout. When the woman was stopped outside the store, the man grabbed the little girl and left.

He later spoke with police by phone, telling them he did not act as a lookout and did not know the woman intended to steal when they went into the store.

Police filled out a Department of Human Services form to report possible child abuse and neglect on the part of the man, who is the little girl's father. The woman was arrested for retail fraud as well as assault and battery.

At 7:40 p.m., officers were called to Kohl's, 901 Joe Mann Blvd., after a man and woman were caught stealing.

The woman, age 18 from Midland, told officers she took clothing valued at \$47 because she needed it for work, then admitted the short shorts she was found with wouldn't be appropriate for her new job.

The man, age 19 from Midland, was found with one package each of socks and underwear valued at a total of \$33. He told police he stole the items because he had money for food or clothes but not both, and that he'd worn the same pair of underwear for two weeks.

Both were jailed.

Cassopolis Vigilant



ONLINE EDITION

Print Page

'CASA Blanca' event will benefit county's children

Thursday, March 29, 2007 10:23 AM EDT

CASSOPOLIS - On Saturday, April 21, Cass County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) will be hosting its first "CASA Blanca" event.

There will be a silent and live auction. The event will be at Orchard Hills Country Club in Buchanan from 6 to 9 p.m. with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. There will also be live entertainment.

Cass County CASA is a non-profit agency of trained volunteers who are appointed by the court to advocate for abused and neglected children in Cass County. Currently there are 152 children in the foster care system in Cass County who would benefit from having a CASA volunteer.

For tickets, contact Lisa Schmidt, CASA program director, at (269) 445-4431 or by e-mail at casscocasa@yahoo.com.

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Article published Mar 30, 2007

EDITORIAL

Allow felony murder charge in domestic-violence cases

If someone dies during the commission of an armed robbery, Michigan law allows the perpetrator to be charged with felony murder, which carries a sentence of life in prison without parole.

While the sentence is the same as for first-degree murder, a prosecutor does not have to prove that a death was premeditated in order to charge felony murder.

In addition to armed robbery, felony murder also can be charged when death occurs during crimes such as rape, larceny or child abuse.

Now state legislators are debating whether to allow felony-murder charges in domestic-violence deaths.

We think they should. Abusers know they are intentionally committing a violent crime when they begin to batter their victims, regardless of whether they intend to kill them. They are aware - or should be - that their actions can prove fatal, just as can happen with an armed robber, rapist or child abuser.

When a death does occur under such violent circumstances, the perpetrator should face severe punishment.

Adding domestic violence to the crimes under which felony murder can be charged will send a strong message that our state does not tolerate acts of violence against one's spouse or loved one. Anger over a domestic matter is never an excuse for assaulting someone, and anyone who kills somebody in such a situation should be treated the same as someone who intentionally kills another person.

Opponents argue that domestic violence often is a crime driven by emotion, and should not be viewed in the same way as a crime that is thought out and planned. We disagree. Civilized society requires that we keep our emotions in check, and when someone's emotions turn to a deadly rage, society needs to be protected from that person.

Our community, like most others across the state, had seen too many cases where domestic violence turned deadly. While allowing felony-murder charges in such cases might not stop them entirely, it definitely would be a deterrent that could help some people keep their anger under control - and save someone's life in the process.

The Detroit News

March 30, 2007

Southfield:Day care license suspended

The state suspended the license of a day care facility this week after discovering violations that endangered the health, welfare and safety of children. The license suspension and eventual revocation prohibits Alanda Knox of 30450 Rock Creek Drive from operating any child care facility. The Michigan Department of Human Services inspected the facility Monday after receiving a complaint and found a violation of supervision and a household member with a criminal offense. Department spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet declined to elaborate on the case, saying Knox, who had a license to care for up to 12 children, is appealing.

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March 30, 2007

Granholt budget cuts pass House

Reductions fall heavily on pensions, day care, higher education; tax, fee increases considered.

Gary Heinlein and Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Lawmakers Thursday eliminated one-third of the state's \$940 million budget problem with final passage of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's executive-order cuts in state spending for the current fiscal year.

The order was passed by the Democratic-controlled House Appropriations Committee 24-6 -- a full House vote is not required. The Republican-controlled Senate adopted the spending reductions last week.

The cuts fall on state funding of employee pensions, State Police auto theft prevention efforts, computer services, day care and burial aid for the poor and state payments to colleges and universities.

Before approving the executive order, committee members questioned the wisdom of several other reductions, including funding for foster care services, a \$20 million cut to a \$26 million forest products development project and less support for a domestic violence prevention program.

"We're not happy about making these cuts, but it's the first step toward resolving the crisis," said state Budget Director Bob Emerson.

House Democrats aren't expected to approve the \$600 million in additional cuts approved by the Senate last week but will work the next two weeks on their own list of reductions, said House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township.

Dillon said the House proposals also will include taxes or fees, because the state also needs a revenue increase by June 1 to balance its books.

Dillon confirmed House Democrats are considering a tax on utilities that could be put in place by summer and raise about \$500 million a year. Dillon also said a public vote on a graduated income tax, consolidation of local governments and an array of other changes are under consideration for the 2008 fiscal year.

Michigan has a flat tax rate. Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, said he wouldn't "torpedo" any potential budget crisis solution, but he's concerned the utility tax would become a "veiled tax increase" on consumers.

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Gov Freezes Grant Payments, Hiring, News Subscriptions

MIRS, March 29, 2007

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** issued a moratorium today on all state grant payments, news agency subscriptions, service contracts, temporary employees, travel, performance pay awards, employee training or any new hires.

As part of 10 budget-cutting executive directives Granholm signed today, every penny spent by state government will be scrutinized by a new state monitor. The governor also plans to permanently consolidate the state's human resources, purchasing and auditing functions along with a serious exploration into merging state departments as a way to save taxpayer money, according to a memo sent by Deputy Chief of Staff Teresa **BINGMAN** to all state directors.

"Because the Legislature has not provided a responsible and comprehensive solution to the state's budget crisis, each department should be ready by next week, to share its contingency plan for operating without General Fund revenue," Bingman wrote. "These plans should account for the possibility that government services dependent on General Fund dollars will be reduced or suspended as soon as early May."

Ed **DORE**, Department of Management and Budget (DMB) deputy director, is being designated as the "special monitor for state purchasing" who will scrutinize every state purchase to make sure it adheres to state purchasing requirements. Also, the hiring of any state employee is subject to a hiring freeze.

Bingman wrote that some functions, like grant payments, would resume when our state's budget and cash flow problems are addressed. But out-of-state travel, for example, is all but prohibited by state employees. All contracts must be competitively bid and approved by the State Administrative Board. Energy and resource conservation measures must be in use in all departments.

"Ongoing training for state employees means better service for citizens, but during this fiscal crisis, we must forego skill upgrades," Bingman wrote. "Further, we must again ask state employees to do more rather than add more staff."

The 10 executive directives include asking state departments to do everything possible to collect every dime owed to the state (ED 2007-15). State government can no longer buy any supplies, materials or equipment that isn't required by a legal mandate or needed to protect the health, safety or welfare of Michigan citizens. Office furniture, for example, would fall under this moratorium (ED 2007-17).

For the rest of the fiscal year, starting April 4, the state cannot make a grant payment unless required by a legal mandate or unless it's necessary to protect the health, safety or welfare of Michigan (ED 2007-11).

No job opening in the state of Michigan can be filled until Sept. 30 unless the Budget Director grants an exception because of a legal mandate or if the position is needed to protect the health, safety or welfare of Michigan citizens (ED 2007-13). Performance pay awards are banned (ED

2007-14). Employee training expenditures are also postponed until Oct. 1 (ED 2007-12).

Also, effective immediately, the state cannot spend any money on any periodical or news services. Rather, it must go through the Michigan Electronic Library (MeL.org) or the Library of Michigan unless an exception to the moratorium is granted by the State Budget Director. Starting Oct. 1, 2007, departments can no longer use or buy subscriptions of \$5,000 or more (ED 2007-16).

The statement, on the consolidating of human resource, purchasing and auditing operations is interesting in that House Minority Leader Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Nov) had called Wednesday for an independent commission to look into such administrative consolidating (See "**Committee Called On To Find Inefficiencies**," 3/28/07).

House Begrudgingly Adopts Budget-Cutting E.O.

MIRS, March 29, 2007

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**'s \$344 million blend of accounting changes and budget cuts to fill about a third of the state's \$941 million budget hole for the current fiscal year will go into effect after the House Appropriations Committee today begrudgingly adopted the proposal.

House Democrats and Republicans alike grumbled about specific cuts made to human services and the chopping of a \$20 million economic development forestry grant, but ultimately approved the executive order (E.O. 2007-3) 24-6, with Appropriations Committee Chair George **CUSHINGBERRY** (D-Detroit) being among the no votes.

"No comment," said Cushingberry as he breezed by reporters after the vote.

"We're interested in a comprehensive solution and this is not a comprehensive solution," said Rep. Matt **GILLARD** (D-Alpena). "We agree with most of what's in here, but this kind of approach is not a comprehensive solution. We want to fix things. This isn't fixing them."

Today's vote may signal a bit of tension between House Democrats, who pledged today to pass through its plan to balance the current Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 and FY 2008 budgets by the end of April, and a nervous administration that's looking at the calendar and tapping its foot.

Sunday marks the halfway point of the fiscal year and the Department of Treasury is pointing at projections that the state won't be able to pay its bills in May at the earliest, but most certainly in August at the latest. The fact the House is still coming up with ideas on how to fix the budget certainly isn't necessarily accelerating the timetable.

The House waited until today, the last session day before the allowable 10-day window the House Appropriations Committee has to act on the E.O., before it voted.

State Budget Director Bob **EMERSON** said he wasn't happy about the cuts made in the executive order, but progress is being made.

"It is an Executive Order that we proposed and I'm happy that it's a step in resolving the crisis that we have," he said. "But we have significant problems that still need to be addressed."

The \$344-million budget-cutting executive order mirrors the governor's first plan with limited exceptions.

The meat of the plan, like the old one, is one-time gimmicks — accounting changes to public employee pensions and delayed payments to universities (\$69.3 million savings) and community colleges (\$12.9 million savings).

In a new twist, the governor also made accounting changes to the state's employee health care payments, which saves the state \$23 million. Republicans have characterized it as being made up of only eight percent of "hard cuts."

As far as cuts, the new casualties included \$20 million for the Michigan Strategic Fund that had been set aside for the Michigan Forest Finance Authority, which ruffled Rep. Mike **LAHTI** (D-

Hancock), one of the other six no votes on the E.O. Outside of the legal ramifications of taking money from the Strategic Fund, the idea of taking away job-producing in the economically struggling Upper Peninsula is hard to defend, he said.

Assorted trims in the Department of Transportation account for \$20.58 million in cuts. This raised the question of whether the state could lose federal matching dollars. Emerson assured the committee that it would not.

Long-term care services within the Department of Community Health were sliced \$1.7 million. A pair of worker's compensation programs totaling \$1.827 million and a parole and probation special operations program costing \$208,300 were also cut.

A few cuts that had been suggested in the first E.O. were pulled out or reduced. Top on the list was \$13.5 million in day care services that were spared. After an impassioned plea from a teenage mom during the House Appropriations Committee a few weeks ago, the \$1.75 million cut for teenage parent counseling was taken off the chopping block.

A \$2.6 million cut to the state's cooperative extension service was halved to \$1.326 million. Rather, the Michigan State University (MSU) agriculture experiment station took a \$1.537 million whack.

Rep. Shanelle **JACKSON** (D-Detroit), Rep. Doug **BENNETT** (D-Muskegon), Rep. Aldo **VAGNOZZI** (D-Farmington Hills) and Rep. Mike **HANSEN** (R-Hart) voted against the E.O.

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Ypsilanti man arrested after chase

A 36-year-old Ypsilanti man was arrested this morning after police chased his vehicle from Ann Arbor to Ypsilanti Township, where a police tracking dog eventually found the man hiding in a shed near a house, Ann Arbor Police said.

Sgt. Brad Hill said an officer attempted to stop the man's white Ford Taurus on I-94 at 3:20 a.m. for an equipment violation and because it matched the description of a car stolen in Ypsilanti Township late

The driver refused to stop, but the chase slowed to speeds of 30 to 50 mph before the man cut the lights off and drove across the median ditch in Ypsilanti Township, Detective Sgt. Jim Stephenson said. County sheriff's deputies joined the chase, and the man's unoccupied car was soon found parked in a driveway in a neighborhood off the expressway, Stephenson said.

A police tracking dog led officers to a storage shed, where he was hiding inside, Stephenson said. The man was arrested after a short struggle.

The suspect - identified as **a juvenile caseworker for the Department of Human Services** - was not driving a stolen car, but apparently fled because he was driving on a suspended license, Stephenson said. The man was being held on fleeing and resisting charges.